



MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

John Cauthorn
18th Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 426
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101
PHONE (573) 751-6858
TDD (573) 751-3969
FAX (573) 751-6900
EMAIL
john_cauthorn@senate.state.mo.us

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Contact: Jerry Dowell
(573) 751-6858

The Cauthorn Report

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – Senator John Cauthorn and his Senate colleagues this week debated at length and ultimately approved the 12 budget bills making up the state’s spending plan for the 2004-2005 fiscal year. Working from a House version, Senators crafted a budget providing \$4.75 billion for K-12 schools, which is more than \$200 million over what schools received this fiscal year. Colleges and universities stand to receive a near 2 percent boost in funding for the coming year.

“We’ve managed to provide more funding for schools and many other state services and programs without relying on the implausible possibility of voters approving any kind of statewide tax hike,” Cauthorn said. “The latest revenue estimates are proving that the way out of a recession lies in legislation promoting economic development, not through burdensome taxation as the governor perennially champions.”

Having cleared both chambers, the \$18.8 billion budget plan moves to joint conference committee where Senate and House differences will be ironed out. Committee delegates will then present the consensus version to their respective chambers for final debate and approval.

Missouri’s constitution requires this year’s budget to be completed by or before 6 p.m., May 7. The year’s regular session adjourns a week later.

The Senate this week also approved and sent to the governor HB 1304, legislation making sweeping reforms to various aspects of Missouri’s civil liability, or “tort” laws.

“Most everyone I talk with views this bill as a major component in closing the widening gap in healthcare accessibility,” Cauthorn said. “And rational, informed people believe this gulf is caused by soaring malpractice insurance premiums driven up by unreasonably high jury awards.”

Reinstating damage award caps and curbing the practice of moving trials to plaintiff-friendly jurisdictions, the act is based on legislation adopted last year by the General Assembly and subsequently vetoed by the governor. Opposed to this year’s version as well, the governor must act on a decision to veto the bill during the regular session, giving lawmakers an opportunity to override a veto this spring, rather than the annual September veto session.

“He said he’s going to veto this one, too, and I have no reason to doubt him on this particular statement since his campaign is running on trial attorney fuel,” Cauthorn said. “The General Assembly might not be able to overturn the veto this spring, but come November, voters having to drive to Kansas or Illinois to visit a doctor will be more than ready for an overhaul in the executive office.

In other action, a House committee this week held a public hearing on, and subsequently approved Senator Cauthorn’s legislation preventing mortgage lenders from requiring borrowers to purchase homeowners’ insurance coverage in excess of the replacement value of the home’s contents and improvements.

“Requiring insurance to cover actual assessed valuation is sound business sense that protects lenders in case of disaster,” Cauthorn said. “Requiring coverage above and beyond a property’s value is unwarranted at best, near greedy at worst and a huge roadblock to attaining the American Dream viewed either way.”

Having already cleared the Senate, passage by the full House of SB 1086 would move the bill to the governor’s desk.

Cauthorn reminds constituents that information on these and all legislative proposals in the General Assembly can be found by browsing the Senate’s website: www.senate.state.mo.us.

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